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A Secret No More
by Senator Larry Craig

Have you noticed that good news often goes unnoticed? I sure have. For every story of deception, greed or violence that appears on the local news or in the paper, I'd be willing to bet there's at least one story of kindness, generosity or something positive that goes unreported. Human beings are captivated by the sensational, so news that may not seem all that remarkable on the surface may get passed over.

Just recently, I came across some news that I thought could bear some more attention. Idaho's economy seems to be in outstanding condition, no matter which way you slice it.

On March 30, the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics announced state-by-state employment numbers, and Idaho looked pretty good. The unemployment rate in the state in February was 3.4 percent, well below the national average of 4.8 percent. Since February 2005, Idaho's unemployment rate dropped from 4.1 percent to its current level of 3.4 percent, with more than 32,000 jobs being created. In fact, our unemployment rate is lower than every one of our neighboring states except Wyoming, which just nosed us out at 3.3 percent.

Some people I've spoken to acknowledge the job growth, but complain that all the new jobs are low-paying, dead-end service sector jobs. Common sense would suggest otherwise, however. As the unemployment numbers inch lower and lower, we are approaching what could be called a labor shortage. The laws of supply and demand tell us when something is in short supply, the price for it rises. Sure enough, employers all across the state are finding that they must offer higher wages or better benefits to attract qualified workers. A recent press release from the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor points out that personal income in Idaho rose by 7.3 percent in 2005.

More tellingly, the Commerce and Labor release says "Per capita income, the amount of income spread over every man, woman and child in Idaho, rose 4.8 percent during 2005, two-tenths of a percentage point higher than the national increase and twice the rate of Idaho's population growth last year." In other words, Idahoans' incomes were rising in 2005, which wouldn't be likely if all the new jobs being created only paid minimum-wage. Incomes and the economy grew so fast that the state had a budget surplus of more than \$200 million this year.

Is the economy in Idaho perfect? No, nobody would claim that. There is always room for improvement. But one thing is certain: Idaho is on the move. We have an environment in our state that

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helps our economy grow and provides opportunities for Idaho workers and families. Several of our neighboring states are likely looking to Idaho and turning green with envy.

Congress and President Bush have been working to create a nationwide environment in which the economy can grow. We've passed several tax-relief packages so American workers can keep more of what they've earned, passed an energy bill, lawsuit reform and bankruptcy reform. Idaho has done an excellent job of taking advantage.

For generations, people have been coming to Idaho for its natural beauty and recreational opportunities that provide such a high quality of life. Many still come for those reasons, but they are also finding, once they arrive, that there are jobs to be had.

Yes, it's true, good news often goes unnoticed. But with its sizzling job market, it appears that Idaho is no longer being overlooked.